

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT



A publication of the Road Commission for Oakland County

www.rcocweb.org

Welcome to the Chairman's End of the Year Report



Happy holidays from the Road Commission for Oakland County, and welcome to the second annual RCOC *End of the Year Chairman's Report*.

This is intended to keep you up to date on what's happening at your Road Commission and what we've accomplished over the last year. I hope you find this useful and informative.

Gregory C. Jamian
Chairman

Board of Road Commissioners:

- Gregory C. Jamian, Chairman*
- Ronald J. Fowkes, Vice Chairman*
- Eric S. Wilson, Commissioner*
- Dennis G. Kolar, PE, Managing Director*
- Gary Piotrowicz, PE, PTOE, Dep. Managing Dir./ County Highway Engineer*

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Ribbon cutting marks completion of Greenfield work

Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) Chairman Greg Jamian was joined by Southfield Mayor (and Congresswoman-elect) Brenda Lawrence and leaders from the Southfield Downtown Development Authority, the 8 Mile Boulevard Association and the Southfield City Council Nov. 6 to celebrate the completion of the project to reconstruct the southbound lanes of Greenfield Road between 8 Mile and 9 Mile roads.

The \$3.1 million project involved the removal and complete reconstruction of the southbound lanes of this section of Greenfield, which was widely acknowledged as one of the roughest sections of road in the county.

"This project was a high priority for the Road Commission," Jamian told the crowd gathered for the ceremony. "The newly reconstructed road will be good for business and will improve the quality of life for residents in the area. Projects like



Southfield City Councilman Myron Frasier (L-R) joins RCOC Chairman Greg Jamian, Councilman Kenson Siver, Southfield Mayor (and Congresswoman-elect) Brenda Lawrence and County Commissioner Nancy Quarles to cut the ribbon to officially open Greenfield Road.

this demonstrate RCOC's commitment to improving the transportation infrastructure in the southern part of the county as well as throughout Oakland County."

Despite busy construction season, roads getting worse: \$600 million in need identified

Despite a near-record construction season this year, including the reconstruction and resurfacing of many roads, more than 40 percent of the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) road system remains in poor condition, and that percentage is expected to continue to grow for the foreseeable future.

In fact, RCOC calculates that \$600 million worth of road projects is needed today just to preserve RCOC's existing roads -- and that number is going to continue to grow unless there is an increase in road funding.

During this year's construction season, RCOC initiated or completed road proj-

ects ultimately worth about \$50 million.

"That's a lot of money," stated RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar.

"However, the reality is this is just the tip of the iceberg."

In fact, Kolar pointed out that the Road Commission predicts that, at current funding levels (without an increase in state road funding), nearly two-thirds of RCOC roads will be in poor condition by 2018.

"Michigan remains in a road-funding crisis," Kolar said. "According to the most recent U.S. Census Bureau data available, Michigan is dead last compared to all other states in per capita state and local spending on roads, and it shows.

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RCOC taking care of business again this winter; hires part-time staff to augment snowplow drivers

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) has been reviewing winter plowing and salting procedures with its truck drivers, preparing its trucks for winter and getting snow plows ready -- all in anticipation of the inevitable arrival of winter weather.

This year, for the third year in a row, RCOC has hired part-time, temporary snowplow/salt-truck drivers to augment its full-time staff. The agency hired approximately 35 temporary drivers.

"Our full-time staff numbers have been reduced so much in recent years that we simply didn't have enough full-time drivers to provide the level of service that the public deserves," explained RCOC Chairman Greg Jamian. "Augmenting the full-time staff with temporary, part-time drivers is a cost-effective way to maintain that level of service."

Jamian noted the agency also has brought back an additional three retired plow drivers on a part-time basis. RCOC has reduced its staff about 35 percent overall since 2007, and nearly 40 percent within the Highway Maintenance Dept., as a result of the decline in state-collected road funding over the last decade.

While the addition of the temporary, part-time workers and retirees should help to alleviate some of the strain caused by staff reductions, RCOC continues to struggle with aging equipment.

"While we have been able to save enough to purchase 18 new trucks in the last year, most of our remaining salting and plowing trucks also should be replaced, but we don't have the money to do that," said RCOC Vice Chairman Ron Fowkes. However, he noted the agency has agreements with the cities of Rochester Hills and Troy that allow those municipalities to repair RCOC equipment.

"We have less than half the mechanics we had in 2007, with a much older fleet," Fowkes said. "That means our trucks need repairs more often, but we have fewer mechanics to repair them. The agreements with Rochester Hills and Troy are a cost-effective way to share resources with some of our partners. It's a win-win situation for both of us."

RCOC Board Member Eric Wilson noted RCOC learned some lessons from last year's historic winter. "Last year, we



An RCOC plow truck equipped with the new wing plow.

RCOC introduces wing plows to improve efficiency of winter road maintenance

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) has introduced a new tool in the effort to fight snow more efficiently: the wing plow.

Wing plows are large plows attached to the sides of snowplow trucks. When in use, the plow extends out from the side of the truck on an angle, allowing the truck to clear an additional six feet of roadway. When not in use, the plow is retracted and stored next to the truck.

RCOC currently has 12 plow trucks equipped with wing plows, with another six expected to arrive shortly.

"The wing plows will be used primarily to more efficiently clear freeway ramps and shoulders on both freeways

and primary roads," explained RCOC Highway Maintenance Department Director Darryl Heid. "Essentially, with the wing plow in use, we accomplish with one pass of the snowplow truck what used to take us two," Heid added.

However, Heid warned motorists that passing a snowplow on the right side is always a bad idea, and it's particularly dangerous when a wing plow is being used. "You may not be aware that the truck is equipped with a wing plow, especially if there's a large cloud of snow being kicked up," he said. "You may not even be able to see the wing plow until you are almost on top of it. It's simply best never to try to pass a snowplow on the right."

received more snow than any winter in the region's recorded history," he explained. "During those extreme conditions, we tried some new options, such as using contracted snowplow services in a broader range of situations. We aren't expecting as bad a winter this year, but if needed, we now have a few more arrows in our operational quiver."

Despite the addition of the part-time, temporary employees and retirees, Jamian pointed out that motorists must be vigilant when driving during or immediately after winter storms. "It's critical that motorists be aware of the road conditions and drive appropriately for those conditions. We will be out salting and plowing whenever it snows, but driver awareness of road

conditions remains a critical element of motorist safety."

A few RCOC winter road maintenance facts

- ▶ RCOC uses an average of 64,000 tons of salt per winter.
- ▶ Used more than 100,000 tons of salt during historic winter of 2013/2014.
- ▶ RCOC salt trucks are kept at six garages located throughout the county. Salt is kept in salt storage facilities at each of those garages. Those facilities, currently nearly full, hold a total of about 37,500 tons of salt.
- ▶ RCOC expects to spend \$12 million on winter road maintenance this year.

Hersey settles in as Road Commission's general counsel

After nearly six years filled with travel and relaxation, longtime Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) attorney Dianne Hersey has given up a life of leisure and cancelled her retirement to come back to take the reins of the Road Commission's Legal Department.

Hersey was named RCOC general counsel upon the retirement of longtime top agency barrister Pat Carty. She previously spent nearly 28 years as an attorney in the Legal Dept. before retiring in 2008 as chief litigation attorney.

Hersey holds both a bachelor's degree and a juris doctorate degree from the



General Counsel Dianne Hersey

University of Michigan.

Maintaining services despite declining resources

Over the last 15 years, the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) has seen revenues from its largest funding source decline or remain stagnant. In the face of this challenge, it has continued to find ways to operate more efficiently, so it can maintain services for its customers.

RCOC's largest source of funding is its share of the Michigan Transportation Fund (MTF), the pot of money made up of the state-collected gas and diesel taxes and vehicle registration fees. As cars have become more fuel efficient and auto sales dropped during the recession, the two largest sources of MTF dollars fell. While the MTF revenues have levelled off, they remain below where they were in the mid-2000s.

Today, RCOC receives about the same amount of MTF dollars that it did in 1999. And yet, the agency continues to provide critical services to its customers.

How has RCOC done this? By finding ways to operate more efficiently. Some of the ways the Road Commission has done this include: privatization, benefit restructuring, staff reductions, increased use of technology, re-organizing departments, cross-training staff, etc.

RCOC has privatized more activities than any Michigan road commission. Agency administration routinely evaluates activities to determine if there is a business case for privatization.

Three years ago, the RCOC Board restructured both pension and post-retirement health-care benefits for new-hire employees, while reducing the employer share of current employee health-care costs and increasing the employee contributions for all employees, ensuring that future Road Commission Boards are not burdened with excessive legacy costs that would erode dollars needed to provide services.

Between 2007 and 2013, RCOC reduced staff by more than 35 percent through attrition. The agency now has fewer employees than at any time since the 1950s, when the county had half the population and one-fifth the traffic.

The RCOC Board and staff are committed to maintaining the level of service for the public, despite Michigan's ongoing and prolonged road-funding crisis.

2014: A productive year for roads

This year has been a productive one when it comes to road projects in Oakland County. Here are some examples of major projects completed by RCOC:

<u>Project</u>	<u>Community</u>
<u>Widening:</u>	
- Tienken Road: Livernois to Paint Creek Trail (final layer of asphalt to be applied in 2015)	Rochester Hills
<u>Reconstruct:</u>	
- Greenfield Road, 8 Mile to just north of 9 Mile (southbound lanes)	Southfield
- Green Lake Road, Commerce to Fieldview (final layer of asphalt to be applied in 2015)	West Bloomfield Twp.
- Northwestern Highway/14 Mile intersection	West Bloomfield Twp./ Farm. Hills border
- Baldwin, I-75 to just north of Brown Road	Auburn Hills & Orion Twp.
<u>Pave Gravel Road:</u>	
- Oak Hill, Dixie Highway to Kier	on Springfield Twp./ Groveland Twp. border
- Clyde, east of Hickory Ridge to Strathcona	Highland Twp.
<u>Simple Asphalt Overlay (1.5 inches of new asphalt on moderate road):</u>	
- Long Lake, Orchard Lake to Adams	Orchard Lake Village, West Bloomfield Twp., Bloomfield Twp., Bloomfield Hills
- Walnut Lake, Franklin to Halsted	West Bloomfield Twp., Bloomfield Twp.
<u>Bridge replacement:</u>	
- Orion Rd. over the Paint Creek	Oakland Twp.

NEEDS – CONT'D FROM FRONT

Kolar noted the extent of the needs on RCOC's roads highlights the critical nature of Michigan's road-funding situation. "It's more critical than ever that the state Legislature address road funding," he said. "The Legislature controls road funding in Michigan, and they must resolve this crisis."

The longer Michigan waits to resolve the road-funding crisis, Kolar said, the

more costly it will be. "Each year that we don't repair our roads, they deteriorate further, and the cost to repair them increases."

RCOC Chairman Greg Jamian concurred. "For the sake of Michigan's businesses and residents, the Legislature needs to make roads a priority," he said. "Michigan will never reach its great potential so long as our road infrastructure is sub-par."



The RCOC Board and top administration. Front row: Board Vice Chairman Ron Fowkes, Chairman Greg Jamian and Commissioner Eric Wilson. Back row: Deputy Managing Director/County Highway Engineer Gary Piotrowicz and Managing Director Dennis Kolar.

Contacting RCOC

If your constituents need information about a road project or want to report a pothole, traffic signal problem or other road issue, they should call RCOC's Department of Customer Services toll free at:

(877) 858-4804

OR

Send us an e-mail via the RCOC
Web site: **www.rcocweb.org**
(click on "Contact us")

Former RCOC Managing Director honored by state

Former Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) Managing Director Brent O. Bair, who retired in 2011 after more than 34 years with the agency, was inducted Nov. 12 into the Michigan Transportation Hall of Honor.

The Hall publicly recognizes individuals who have made an outstanding contribution to Michigan's roads or public transportation systems. The Hall is a permanent display in the Michigan Dept. of Transportation (MDOT) building in Lansing.

Bair was recognized for his longtime leadership in the public roads field and for overseeing the implementation of a variety of cutting-edge initiatives. During his tenure, RCOC developed the second-largest adaptive traffic signal system in North America and became home to the state's highest concentration of roundabouts.

He was also honored for his contributions to making Oakland County roads among the safest in the world for a community its size and population. Prior to the agency officially designating safety as its top priority in 1978, Oakland County had a traffic fatality rate higher than the state as a whole or the nation. Today, Oakland's traffic fatality rate is less than half the state or national rates.

"I am proud of many accomplishments of the Road Commission," Bair stated at the Hall of Honor induction ceremony Wednesday in Lansing. "But the thing that really hits home for me is that we reduced the number of people being killed every year in traffic crashes by more than 100. That means 100 people every year who are alive today in part because of the efforts we made at the Road Commission."



Bair (right) receives the Hall of Honor Award from MDOT Director Kirk Steudle.